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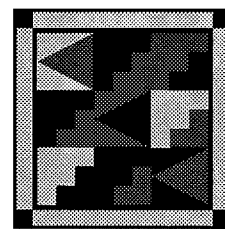
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# Clinton County Child Care Needs Assessment

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C E N T E R  
*for*  
F A M I L I E S  
*at*  
P U R D U E  
U N I V E R S I T Y

**Clinton County Child Care Needs Assessment**

**Final Report**

**September, 1998**

**Clinton County Step Ahead Council**

**conducted by the  
Center for Families  
Purdue University**

**James Elicker  
Aprile Benner  
Georgia Hahn  
Jodie Hertzog  
Katherine Kensinger**

## **Preface**

In February 1998 the Clinton County Step Ahead Council, represented by Coordinator Chuck Smith, requested assistance from the Purdue University Center for Families in conducting a county-wide child care needs assessment. The goal of the Step Ahead Council was to update two previous child and family needs assessment studies completed in 1992 and 1995, and to provide data and recommendations useful for strategic planning for child care efforts in the county.

The Center for Families contacted James Elicker, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Child Development & Family Studies. He agreed to oversee the needs assessment study in collaboration with Purdue students enrolled in a graduate-level course in community research. The students, three graduates and one advanced undergraduate, were Aprile Benner, Georgia Hahn, Jodie Hertzog, and Katie Kensinger.

After planning meetings in March, April, and May between the Purdue research team and members of the Step Ahead Council and its Child Care Planning Committee, needs assessment study objectives were set and a work plan was approved. Collection of needs assessment data began in June and was concluded in early August. Data gathering methods included reviews of existing data, phone interviews with key community professionals, a county-wide parent survey questionnaire, and focus groups with parents and child care providers.

This report is the culmination of efforts by the Purdue research team, Step Ahead Council members, and many community volunteers. The child care needs we identify and our recommendations will provide a basis for discussion and planning of more effective child care supports and services-- with benefits for children, families, employers, and communities throughout Clinton County.

## **Acknowledgments**

Members of the Clinton County Step Ahead Council were generous in giving their time in meetings to discuss the needs assessment study. Helpful suggestions for the study design were given several Council members. Chuck Smith, Step Ahead Coordinator, Edile Woodruff, Executive Director of Big Brothers/Big Sisters, and Susan Tharp, Clinton County Cooperative Extension Educator, were especially helpful throughout the entire needs assessment process. Dan Taylor of NBD Bank provided valuable comments about the draft report. In addition, many Council members participated in phone interviews as key community professionals (see list of interview participants, Appendix A.)

The following persons were instrumental in helping the Purdue research team to organize and carry out the focus group interviews:

Michelle Craig, Family Tree/First Steps  
Maricelis Fonfrias, Hispanic Community Services  
Kristin Hibbard, Farmer's Bank  
Jackie Kwasigroh, Head Start  
Melani Perdue, Holiday Inn Express  
Edile Woodruff, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, Connexions

A number of businesses deserve special thanks for their donations to focus group participants. These businesses support Step Ahead's efforts to improve the lives of children and families in Clinton County. They deserve your support in return! They are:

Holiday Inn Express (Frankfort)  
McDonald's (Frankfort)  
Movie Time (Frankfort)  
Pepe's (Frankfort)  
Walmart (Frankfort)  
Lone Star (Lafayette)  
Olive Garden (Lafayette)  
Red Lobster (Lafayette)

## **Executive Summary**

### **The Needs Assessment Study**

The purpose of the 1998 Clinton County Step Ahead Child Care Needs Assessment, conducted by the Department of Child Development & Family Studies at Purdue University, was to provide information useful for planning child care services in Clinton County in the next 5 years, including:

- current supply and demand for child care;
- types of child care preferred;
- services needed but not available;
- common child care problems and their impact on families;
- adequacy of resources for parents and child care providers; and
- recommendations for meeting child care needs in the next 5 years.

Needs assessment data were collected using: 1) review of existing information relevant to child care needs; 2) parent survey questionnaires; 3) interviews with community professionals; and 4) focus groups with parents and child care providers.

## **Findings**

### **Supply and Demand for Child Care**

1. The demand for child care in the county is expected to remain stable or increase in the next 5 years.
2. The supply of licensed child care is in short supply, especially licensed care of reasonable quality.
3. Many parents do not know about resources that are available to help them find, assess the quality of, and pay for child care.

### **Types of Care in Short Supply**

1. There are significant shortages of care for infants/toddlers, and evening and night care for children of 2nd and 3rd shift workers.
2. The lack of options for families when children are ill is a serious problem.
3. Care for young children with special needs is in short supply for those who need it.
4. There are some indications that more developmentally-appropriate after school and summer "care" is needed for middle school children and that more care is needed for Spanish-speaking families.

### **Child Care Preferences**

1. Although many families in Clinton County prefer to care for their young children at home or with relatives, some families may be unable to find the type of care they need.
2. Parents desire child care that is affordable, of reasonable quality, available during their work hours (including part-time), and located conveniently.

### **Child Care Problems/Impact**

1. The high cost of child care is perceived as the number one problem by parents. While the cost of child care undoubtedly prohibits some families from obtaining needed care, it may also be the case that some families who can afford it do not fully recognize the value of quality child care.
2. Parents suffer from a lack of information and support when seeking child care or when they have problems with their child care arrangements.
3. Child care providers suffer from low pay and benefits, low public status, and low levels of support from parents, other providers, and the community. This results in difficulty recruiting new providers, low motivation for professional development, fewer efforts to become licensed or to improve quality, and a high turnover rate.
4. Lack of available care in the evening prevents some parents from working, stresses families, and prevents some parents from furthering their education or training.
5. Transportation to and from child care is a problem for some families, especially those without reliable transportation and those with children of different ages who receive care in more than one location.
6. Unstable child care arrangements and ill children result in a significant number of missed work days for Clinton County employees.
7. Parents report that some child care providers do not consistently provide child care that meets minimum quality standards set by the state.

### **Resources for Child Care Providers**

1. While some child care providers take advantage of training opportunities, many providers, especially unlicensed providers, may be unaware of the resources available to them.
2. Child care providers lack sufficient incentives to become licensed and receive professional training.

## **Recommendations for Action**

### **Increase the Supply of Quality Child Care**

1. Increase the number of licensed slots for infants by developing a center that includes an infant/toddler program or by creating incentives and supports for licensed family child care providers to take more infants. Possible incentives for providers might include special training, equipment grants, supplements to reimbursements or fees, and regular relief/substitute care.
2. Provide public encouragement and incentives for parents of young children (and other caring adults) to consider becoming licensed family child care providers. Publicize opportunities through informational workshops for prospective providers. Provide ongoing training and support for new providers.
3. Consider creating an organized family child care home network, sponsored by a community agency, to provide provider recruitment, support, training, quality assurance, and incentives to professionalize. Another function of a network might be to offer specialized care, such as evening care or sick child care.
4. Create a collaborative committee including community service organizations, community agencies, employers, and local government, to more carefully assess the child care needs of factory workers. Create a feasible plan for fundraising, construction, and operation of an on-site or near-site child care center in the manufacturing zone along State Rte. 28 in Frankfort.
5. Encourage the Head Start program to seek funding for full-day, full-year child care for low income families.

### **Support Child Care Providers and Increase Quality**

6. Encourage experienced child care providers to seek accreditation, showing a high level of service quality and professionalism.
7. Develop a public education campaign directed at parents and employers to emphasize the importance of quality child care and the "true cost" of quality care, with its essential benefits for children, families, employers, and the wider community.

### **Support Families Needing Child Care**

8. Create parent networks for the purpose of reducing the isolation of young families, whether they use purchased child care or not-- to share child care, support, and information.
9. Explore strategies to make it easier for employers to provide child care subsidies as an employee benefit. Publicly recognize employers who take steps to implement "family-friendly" policies.



10. Include Clinton County's Hispanic community in planning for new child care services, making sure that this part of the community is represented in the planning process and that Spanish-speaking or bilingual providers are included.
11. Using the Connexions resource and referral agency as a collaborator, disseminate highly visible information to help parents explore their child care options. Include information about assessing the quality of care, the cost of quality care, making wise child care choices, and taking advantage of government subsidies.

## **Overview of the Needs Assessment Study**

Early in 1998 the Step Ahead Council of Clinton County determined that the county did not have a sufficient strategic plan for meeting the current and future child care needs of families. The Council approached the Center for Families at Purdue University to undertake a child care needs assessment study to determine the present state of child care in the county and to make recommendations for short and long term child care goals.

The Center for Families recommended that James Elicker, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Child Development & Family Studies and a team of students be contracted to complete the needs assessment study. After a series of meetings in the spring of 1998, the Step Ahead Council approved the Purdue research team's proposal to complete the needs assessment during the summer of 1998, with results to be presented in a report in September. With the resulting child care needs information, the Step Ahead Council will collaborate with other interested organizations in Clinton County to formulate a five year plan for meeting child care needs and for obtaining the funds (federal, state, local, and private) to meet these needs.

The needs assessment conducted by the Purdue team consisted of the following methods of data collection: 1) examination of existing data; 2) interviews with key community professionals; 3) a child care parent survey questionnaire; and 4) focus group interviews with parents and child care providers.

The research questions were:

1. What is the current and projected demand for child care services in Clinton County? What is the current child care supply?
2. What types of child care services are needed but not available?
3. What types of child care do families in Clinton County prefer?
4. What are the most common child care problems experienced by Clinton County families? How do these problems affect children, parents' work experience, and other areas of family life?
5. What resources are available to Clinton County child care providers to help them offer quality care? Are the resources adequate, or are there unmet provider needs?
6. What are recommendations for meeting Clinton County child care needs in the next five years?

## Review of Existing Data

Prior to collecting new data about Clinton County child care needs, existing information relevant to the needs assessment objectives was gathered and reviewed by the research team. This information came from newspaper reports, past reports and surveys, the U.S. Census, Internet resources, and other sources. Findings are organized as follows: population trends; growth in the Hispanic community; employment; previous child and family needs assessments; and current child care supply and demand.

### Population Trends

Clinton County population trends, as they impact current and projected child care needs, were assessed by looking at trends in the public school population, trends in county births, and recent population projections. According to available data from the U.S. Census Bureau<sup>1</sup>, total county population in 1990 was 31,545, increasing in 1995 to 32,594. While some projections<sup>2</sup> have predicted a declining trend in child population through in the late 1990's and early 2000's, recent data suggest otherwise:

**Birth Trends.** Earlier population projections concluded that there will be a decline in the county's child population between 1997 and 2010<sup>3</sup>. However recent birth data call these projections into question. When we looked at county birth data from 1992 to 1996<sup>4</sup> (see Figure 1) we found an increase of 54 births between 1995 and 1996. More recent county-wide birth data were not available, so we cannot conclude that this trend has continued, but this is a dramatic 11.7% one year increase.

**Public School Enrollment Trends.** Public school enrollment data were collected by calling all county school corporations and requesting past, current, and projected enrollments. From 1993 to the 2001 school year, there is a 7% projected increase in total enrollment in kindergarten through third grade for all schools combined (from 1,992 in 1993 to a projected 2,130 in 2001. See Figure 2.) This suggests that there will be an increased need for after school child care and also an increased need for pre-kindergarten child care in the next few years.

**Recent Population Projections.** Earlier estimates projecting declines in overall population in the late 1990's and early 2000's may not have taken into account recent and projected growth in manufacturing employment and resulting migration of new residents into the county for these new jobs. There are currently an estimated 33,227 residents in Clinton County<sup>5</sup>, representing a 7% increase since 1995. Of the current residents, 17,683 (53%) live in Frankfort, and about 23% (7,642) are 0 to 14 years old. In a recent Cinergy report<sup>6</sup> (including these

<sup>1</sup> Reported in *The Indiana Factbook*, IN Dept. of Commerce, 1994-95.

<sup>2</sup> For example, *Kids Count in Indiana Data Book*, Indiana Youth Institute, 1997.

<sup>3</sup> *Kids Count in Indiana Data Book*, Indiana Youth Institute, 1997.

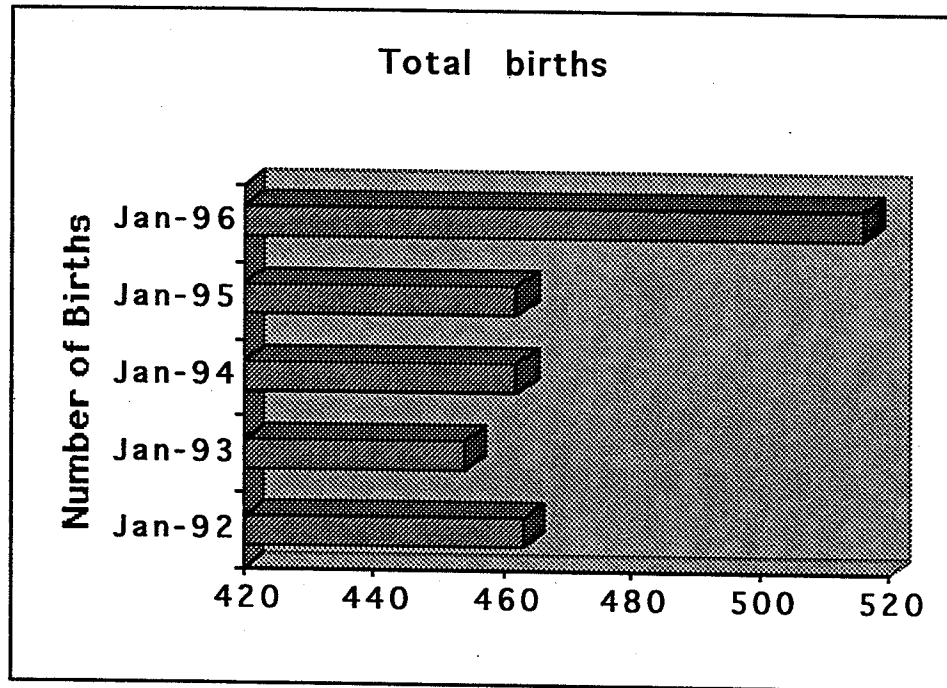
<sup>4</sup> Indiana State Department of Health, June 4, 1998.

<sup>5</sup> Cinergy/ PSI Economic Development report by Equifax National Decision System, 1998.

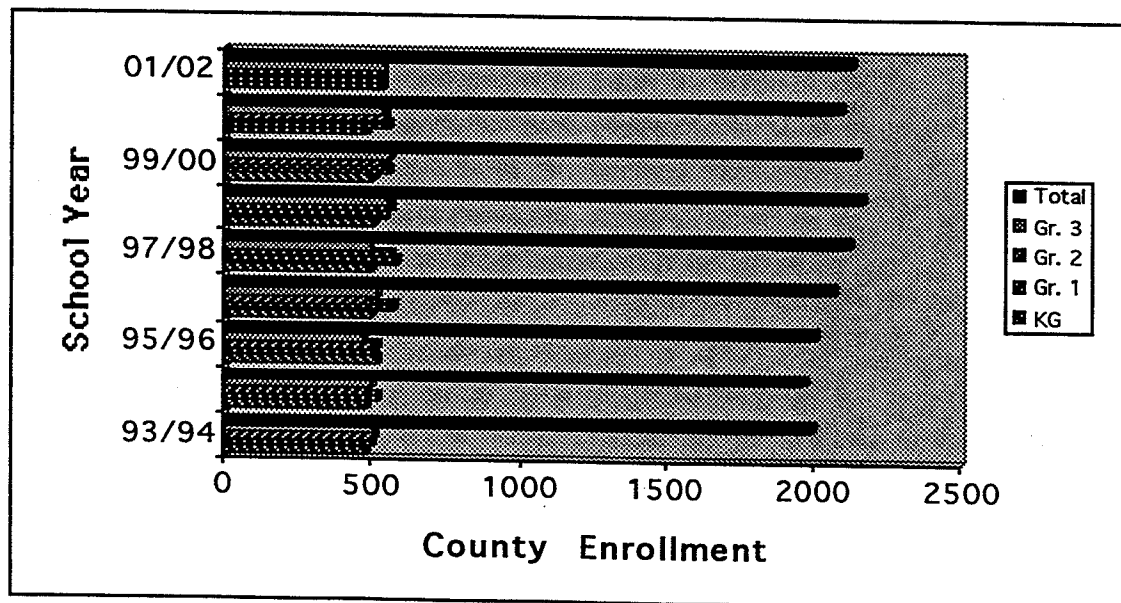
<sup>6</sup> Cinergy/ PSI Economic Development report by Equifax National Decision System, 1998.

employment projections) county population between 1997 and 2002 is projected to increase by 1523 residents (a 5% increase). Further, many new residents moving into Clinton County for newly created manufacturing jobs are likely to be young parents with children, without existing extended family support.

**Figure 1. Births to Clinton County Residents, 1992-1996 (source: IN Dept. of Health)**



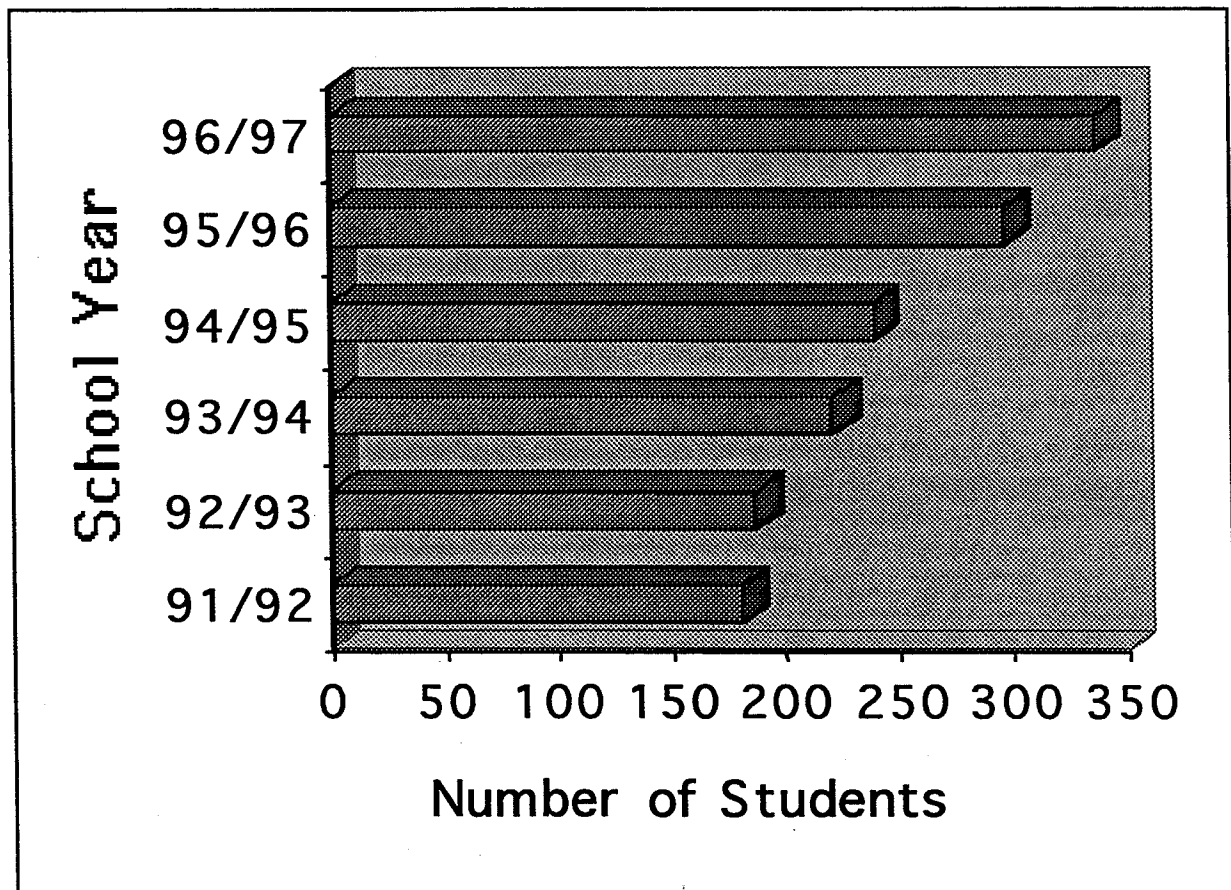
**Figure 2. Clinton County School Enrollments, Grades K-3, 1993 to 2002 (projected)– As reported by each school corporation.**



### Growth in the Hispanic community

The minority population of Clinton County, predominantly Hispanic residents, is increasing. Numbers of minority children in the public schools increased in each of the four school corporations in the county from a total of 181 in 1991 to 337 in 1996 (an 89% increase)<sup>7</sup>. This increase, based on minority enrollment in kindergarten through 12th grade, can be seen in Figure 3. While it is difficult to project from these school enrollment data the exact number of young minority children needing child care outside of school, it is apparent that the need for child care for Hispanic children and families has increased.

**Figure 3. Total Number of Minority Students in Clinton County Schools, 1991-1997.** (source: IN State Department of Education)



<sup>7</sup> Indiana Department of Education, 1998.

## Employment

A recent Cinergy report was reviewed for current and projected Clinton County employment data<sup>8</sup>. Manufacturing makes up the largest source of employment for Clinton County (46%), followed by service jobs (12%), retail trade (8%), construction (6%), wholesale trade (4%), agriculture (4%), transportation (3%), and utilities (3%). Agricultural services, forestry, fisheries, and other types of employment comprise 1% or less of the work force. The Cinergy report estimates that manufacturing employment will increase by 400 jobs during the next two to three years. With this increase in manufacturing jobs, there may be an increase in the need for child care for various work shifts, particularly evening and night shifts. Typically, entry-level manufacturing jobs employ younger workers in the later shifts. This would include parents with young children, making evening and night child care a higher priority.

## Previous Needs Assessments

In 1992 and 1995, child and family needs assessment studies were completed for Clinton County. Both studies included many additional issues besides child care. However, there were several parallels in the conclusions about child care needs in the two reports.

The 1992 needs assessment<sup>9</sup> was coordinated by Susan Tharp, Step Ahead Coordinator, and compiled by Robert Brinkley of Ball State University. The purpose was to identify unmet needs of Clinton County families and to make recommendations to improve services. In 1992, there were 200 licensed child care slots for an estimated 2,801 children of working parents age 5 or under in Clinton County. Of those licensed child care slots, only 10 to 15 were available for infants. A shortage in the quantity and quality of child care were among important issues identified by parents. The importance of these issues was brought to the attention of residents of Clinton County in 1991 when a child care center was closed because it was not able to meet the state fire code. An outcome of the 1992 needs assessment was that the YMCA Kids World child care center was opened, resulting in an increase of 90 licensed child care slots.

One recommendation of the 1992 study was to involve local companies in helping to start child care centers. Another recommendation was for Clinton County to raise funds with the purpose of opening more child care facilities. Other identified concerns were the lack of infant care, sick child care, and 24-hour care for shift workers' children. Recommendations were to open one or more new child care centers offering 24-hour care and care for infants. A final recommendation for increasing the number of child care slots was to work with public schools, sharing facilities but keeping the program developmentally appropriate.

The 1995 needs assessment study was conducted by Ball State University's Social Science Research Center<sup>10</sup>. The purpose of the study was to assemble current

<sup>8</sup> Cinergy/ PSI Economic Development report by Equifax National Decision System, 1998.

<sup>9</sup> *Step Ahead Needs Analysis Report*, 1992.

<sup>10</sup> *1995 Step Ahead Needs Assessment Study Report*, Social Science Research Center, Ball State University, 1995.

data to help guide Clinton County residents in making decisions which would affect children and their families. The needs assessment report ranked child care as one of the top five problems for children and families in Clinton County. Specific needs identified concerning child care were: affordable/good quality child care, infant child care, and evening and weekend care. Recommendations for addressing child care needs were to offer more infant care and more 24-hour child care. It was also recommended that employers collaborate to offer child care on site that would meet the needs of shift workers' children. Finally, the study report included a recommendation that there should be more support for home-based child care, to help providers become more business-oriented and professional.

### **Child Care Supply and Demand**

As of July, 1998 there were: 1 licensed center with a total of 82 child slots; 11 licensed family child care homes with a total of 132 slots; 1 registered child care ministry center, with an additional ministry center planned to open in the near future, representing a total 80 to 100 slots; and 21 legally-exempt unlicensed family child care homes with a total of 100 slots.<sup>11</sup> The maximum number of licensed or registered child care slots available was therefore 414.

In 1995 the number of children from 0 to 9 years old residing in the county was 4660.<sup>12</sup> Assuming that at least 60% of mothers of children in this age range are employed outside the home (a conservative estimate based on the actual rate of 61% from the 1990 U.S. Census), at least 2800 children need some kind of child care while their mothers are at work. Therefore, we estimate that at most only 15% of children needing care are served by licensed or registered/exempt child care centers or homes. Even if a majority of the remaining 85% are receiving child care by parents or relatives, there may be more than 1000 children in Clinton County who are receiving nonrelative child care in informal, unregulated settings. While these are estimates, they do indicate a critical shortage of child care with even minimal quality standards.

An additional indicator of current child care needs may be requests by parents to Connexions, the child care resource and referral agency. Connexions is a program that, upon request, provides information about available licensed child care. From January to April of 1998, Connexions had a total of 15 requests from Clinton County parents seeking child care providers. The requests were as follows: 8 for infant/toddlers; 6 for preschoolers; and 1 for a school age child. While this report certainly indicates some unmet child care needs, we suspect that the Connexions service is not fully utilized by families seeking child care.

Finally, some indication of child care needs can be deduced from program waiting lists. As of August, 1998 there was a waiting list of more than 20 children for the YMCA Kids World child care center in three age groups: 4-5 children waiting for the 2 to 3 year old group; 14-15 children waiting for the 3 to 4 year old group; and 1-2 children waiting for the kindergarten group.<sup>13</sup> Callers often ask for infant and toddler care, as well. The YMCA (which does not provide infant/toddler care) refers parents

<sup>11</sup> Connexions Child Care Resource & Referral, phone interview, July, 1998.

<sup>12</sup> *Kids Count in Indiana 1997 Indiana Data Book*, Indiana Youth Institute.

<sup>13</sup> Phone interview with Sandy Waninger, Director of YMCA Kids World, August, 1998.

with these requests to Connexions child care resource and referral; the YMCA does not keep track of requests for infant/toddler care.

## **Conclusions**

The population of families with young children in Clinton County will likely increase by at least 5% over the next five years, based on projections of employment opportunities, school populations, and recent birth data. In 1990, 61% of parents with children under 6 years were dual income earners, and this percentage has probably increased during the decade. The primary growth in projected employment in the county is in manufacturing, which means that increasing numbers of families will need child care at various times in the day and evening, depending upon assigned work shifts.

Certain child care issues seem to have persisted through the 1990's, when findings from these data are compared with the conclusions of previous needs assessment reports. Families want and need affordable child care of reasonable quality. There is a significant shortage of affordable, quality out-of-home care for children who need it, but especially for infants and toddlers and for the children of evening and night shift factory workers. An additional issue which has arisen during this decade concerns the child care needs of a growing number of Hispanic families residing in Clinton County.



## **Interviews with Key Community Professionals**

A second data collection method for the needs assessment study was interviews with key community professionals ("key informants") about current Clinton County child care needs. Key informants are people who have an informed perspective on families and child care within the county. A list of possible key informants included members of the Step Ahead Council and other people within the community recommended by members of the Council. From 39 possible individuals, 30 were chosen as potential key informants. A standard interview protocol was used by members of the Purdue research team (see Appendix B). All interview questions pertained directly to the six needs assessment questions. Each community professional was contacted by phone, and a total of 23 individuals were interviewed (see Appendix A).

Information from each interview was summarized, and all summaries were analyzed using the following categories:

- The supply of quality child care available
- Unmet needs of parents
- Factors parents consider when making choices about child care
- Parents' complaints about child care
- Unmet needs of child care providers
- Solutions for unmet needs of child care providers and parents

### **Child Care Supply**

Community key informants both supported and disputed the conclusion that there is currently an adequate supply of child care in Clinton County. One-third of those interviewed claimed that an adequate supply of child care did exist, because there are a number of licensed home care facilities as well as a large child care center. There are options available for parents of preschoolers, and there are more than enough school-age spots at the YMCA. If the need was greater for school-age care, the YMCA could take additional children as well. Financial aid subsidies are available for low-income parents.

However, many of those who supported the conclusion of an adequate supply of child care in Clinton County also supported the notion of an inadequate supply of high quality child care and certain types of specialized care. Almost 80% of all those interviewed stated that there was not an adequate supply of quality child care available. In addition to questioning the quality of available child care, many informants believe that there are not enough licensed child care providers in the county. The supply of child care providers may not be increasing due to a decrease in the amount of funding for child care food programs, training, and start-up costs. Also lacking is an adequate supply of specialized child care, including infant care, extended hours care, sick child care, middle school child care, and care for children with special needs.

## **Unmet Child Care Needs**

The community professionals interviewed mentioned several types of child care services that are needed but not currently available to families in Clinton County. Over half of all informants mentioned shift/extended hour child care as a critical unmet need of parents, and almost half of the informants who mentioned it ranked it as a top priority. They felt that the population most affected by this deficiency is young, single, and/or low-income families. Some reasons mentioned for the lack of this type of child care included inconvenience and lack of incentives for providers. Also mentioned frequently (43% of informants) was the lack of infant care. Most felt this was a widespread need that especially affected young families and the working poor. The reasons that informants gave for the existence of this shortage included stricter provider to child ratio requirements and the expense and extra energy required of providers to care for children under age two. Half of the informants who cited this as a problem ranked it as a top priority.

The need for child care for sick children was mentioned by over a quarter or the key informants interviewed, and it was ranked as a second to third priority. Many of the informants felt that the lack of sick child care affected low-income and single parents primarily due to the fact that these families cannot afford to take time off of work to care for a sick child. The cost of a sick child care facility and the varying number of children requiring care on a daily basis were reasons informants listed for the lack of sick child care.

Also mentioned by over a quarter of key informants was the need for better quality child care and child care providers. Many providers do not have enough training, and child care regulations may not be being followed consistently or being enforced stringently. Child care providers may not be well educated and may not be able to afford training or measures to increase the quality of their facilities. According to some informants, many people within the county devalue the importance of child care, and parents may not be willing to pay more for better quality.

Another problem mentioned by over 25% of key informants was the lack of enough child care facilities; this was ranked as a top priority by all informants who mentioned it as a need facing families. The reasons mentioned for this need include a lack of available child care providers in the county, the lack of benefits for providers, and the difficulty of providing quality child care. Although not as frequently mentioned, the key informants interviewed listed several other problems with child care in the county including middle school age child care, care for children with special needs, weekend care, and transportation issues, all of which were rated lower on the priority list.

## **Preferred Types of Child Care**

Key informant interviews provide evidence for what types of child care parents in Clinton County prefer. Of the characteristics that key informants felt that parents considered when choosing child care, a majority (70%) stated that cost of child care was extremely important. Parents want and require child care that is affordable to them. However, some of the informants believe that many people in the

county are not educated about the fees required for quality child care. These parents do not realize how low child care costs in Clinton County are, as compared with costs in other counties in the state.

Another child care characteristic that over 50% of key informants felt parents consider is the quality of the child care facility. Parents want a warm and loving environment for their children. They are also concerned with other quality issues such as the activities offered, the experience of the provider, the presence of developmentally appropriate toys, safety issues, and the quality of provider-child interactions.

Although not mentioned as frequently by the key informants, there are also many other characteristics that families consider when making child care choices for their children. Hours of availability is one such issue. This affects not only parents who work late shifts, but parents who work extended daytime hours as well. Parents also look for child care that is in a convenient location, although key informants were split as to whether parents most often preferred child care close to home or close to work. Finally, when making child care choices, some key informants believe that parents also consider the provider's characteristics. It is important for the family to have a positive and trusting relationship with the provider. Parents look for providers with experience, including in some cases knowledge about children with special needs.

### **Child Care Problems**

When considering child care problems that families in Clinton County face, nearly half of the key informants mentioned cost. Many parents feel the cost of child care is simply too high, especially when a family has more than one child requiring care. In some cases, families may have to use more than one earner's salary just to pay the child care provider.

Problems with the quality of child care was mentioned by several key informants as well. Many families find that their children are not adequately supervised or are improperly fed. Some providers lack training or are unreliable. Parents may also experience a poor relationship with the provider, or they may disagree with discipline tactics that the provider uses. The quality of the environment is also an issue, for parents consider some child care facilities to not be clean or safe, or the ratios of providers to children may be extremely high.

Almost one-third of the key informants mentioned that another child care complaint of parents is that there is simply not enough child care available in the county. Parents do not have a lot of options when making choices about out-of-home child care, since there are so few child care facilities (including both center care and home care). Of the limited child care available, key informants mentioned that there is even less infant care, evening shift care, and sick child care. Thus, parents who face these issues are at an even greater disadvantage when searching for child care.

## **Unmet Child Care Provider Needs**

The unmet needs facing child care providers were also discussed in the key informant interviews. The most common issue mentioned by informants was the need for more regulation and training of child care providers. Many providers are not properly educated about nutrition and child development. Many child care providers may also be unaware of the variety of supportive services available to them in the county, such as the lending library, and many are not informed about legal issues that they face (divorce/custody issues, etc.).

Another problem mentioned by almost a third of informants is the cost of providing care. In order to become licensed, home care providers must usually invest money to bring their facilities up to licensing standards (installation of fences, smoke detectors, etc.). Many providers are unable to afford this, and they also may not be able to afford helpers/aides, or educational activities and equipment.

A lack of professionalism in the child care profession was listed as a problem by over 25% of informants. Providers often do not present themselves in a professional manner, and thus they lose respect with the families with whom they work. This lack of professionalism is further aggravated by the lack of a formal network of child care providers. Providers often do not support each other, and they have not established consistent standards within their practice. Other provider problems that informants mentioned include difficulty in finding substitutes, low pay, lack of benefits, lack of community support, and the difficulty of providing child care.

It is important to note that over 25% of the key informants felt that there were many resources available to child care providers. Thus, these individuals concluded, providers in Clinton County should not be facing any unmet needs. There is funding available in the county for both licensing and training of providers, and the food subsidy program provides additional financial support. The Step Ahead Council serves as a great resource, but it was suggested that some providers may "want the council to solve all of their problems," above and beyond providing funds for training and licensing. According to these key informants, if providers are committed and resourceful, they should be able to find the support and information that they require.

## **Suggested Solutions**

Although many of the key informants identified the same problems of child care in Clinton County, few agreed on how to best address them. Increasing the number of infant care providers was the most common recommendation of informants (40%). Some suggested a separate facility be created solely for infants. Others suggested that special incentives should be given to home care providers to offer infant care. Providing a special substitute for infant care providers was another suggestion, which would allow infant care providers to have some sort of break during the week.

To meet needs related to sick child care, a few informants suggested that a child care provider "partner" with the local hospital to provide temporary care for sick

children. Another suggested solution was to support the creation of a corporate-sponsored sick child care program.

Another common recommendation for improving child care was the creation of a new child care center. Several informants suggested that a center should be built at or near the manufacturing sector of Frankfort. However, they did not state what sort of care this center might provide. Some suggested that a center should be built to serve children from birth to middle school, while others suggested a center should be created solely for infants. Finally, four informants proposed that a new center should be built as a partnership between parents, the private sector, and local government.

In direct opposition to building a center, one informant proposed that nontraditional care options should be explored. This individual felt that Clinton County needs to "think smaller." One example of this would be to have spouses of second and third shift factory workers provide child care for other factory workers' children during these odd-hour shifts. If each one of these spouses cared for two to three children, then the problem of extended hour child care would be solved. These new child care providers would benefit from the additional income of providing child care.

Families were the target of other recommendations for improving child care in the county. Informants suggested that a formal network of parents should be created. This network would provide parents with a listing of child care providers in the county as well as recommendations and references. This network could also educate parents about the cost of child care and the features of quality child care. Other suggestions for improving child care in the county involved providing additional subsidies for parents, either as employee benefits or through local, state, or federal funds. By providing these subsidies, more parents would be able to afford quality care.

Finally, some recommendations for meeting the county's child care needs pertained directly to providers. Over 20% of informants suggested that providers should be better educated. All providers, especially unlicensed ones, should be made aware of licensing requirements so that they seem less threatening. New providers should be better trained in child development, infant care, and care for special needs children, and more experienced providers should continue to learn more about child care and child care issues. Several informants also recommended that funding and incentives for child care providers should be increased. Salaries and benefits for providers could be supplemented through local, state, federal or private funds. With increased incentives, more providers could be recruited into the field and good current providers could be persuaded to remain.

## Conclusions

The key community professionals interviewed have divided opinions as to the supply of child care in Clinton County. While 35% believe there is an adequate supply of child care, when asked if there is an adequate supply of quality child care, 80% answered no. Specifically, these informed individuals identified extended hours, infant,

middle school age, sick child, and special needs child care as lacking both in supply and in quality.

Informants identified several unmet child care needs of families in Clinton County. The following are the needs that the county faces in prioritized order (where priority is determined by both the number of respondents that listed the need as well as the importance ranking each need was given by the informant):

- Shift/extended hours care
- Infant care
- Too few child care facilities
- Sick child care (tie)
- Quality of care (tie)
- Transportation issues
- Middle school care
- Care for special needs children (tie)
- Weekend care (tie)

These key informants suggested characteristics of the type of child care that families in Clinton County need. Foremost, this care would be affordable, even when families have multiple children in child care. Secondly, the child care facility would meet high quality standards. Children would be cared for in a loving environment. Developmentally appropriate toys and activities would be available in a safe facility, and the provider would be experienced. Other characteristics that parents desire are extended hours of availability at a child care facility that is in a convenient location (either close to work or home) and an honest child care provider who can establish a positive relationship with the family.

The key informants identified three major problems that families currently face in child care. The most common complaint is that families find child care to be too expensive, especially when more than one child requires care. The quality of the child care facilities is almost as common a complaint. Parents are sometimes faced with providers who offer poor supervision, an unclean and unsafe environment, and high child/adult ratios. Providers are sometimes unreliable or uneducated, and parents may develop poor relationships with their providers. The final child care problem is the overall lack of child care available in the county. This is an even greater problem for certain types of child care, such as infant care, extended hour care, and sick child care.

In regard to problems facing providers, over 25% of informants felt that the needs of providers should already be adequately met. Money is available for licensing and training, and the Step Ahead Council serves as one resource of information among many sources in the county. However, many key informants identified problems that providers may be facing that contribute to problems in the overall county child care picture. The following list of unmet provider needs is prioritized according to the number of informants who identified the need:

- Need for more training, education, and regulation
- Expense of providing care
- Lack of professionalism
- Difficulty finding substitutes (tie)
- Poor benefits (tie)
- Difficult work (tie)

The key community professionals made several recommendations for addressing the child care needs of Clinton County. The primary concern is increasing the number of infant care facilities (through a new center, increased number of infant care providers, etc.). Another popular recommendation is to build a new child care facility; however, most disagree on what population should be targeted. Some suggestions included infants, sick children, or all age facility. In opposition to creating a new center, one informant suggested that the county should instead "think smaller." Other recommendations included creating a parent network, providing child care subsidies for parents, increasing the education of providers, and granting incentives for new and continuing child care providers.

### **Recommendations**

From the interviews, several recommendations for future action by the Step Ahead Council can be made. Increasing the number of providers through increased incentives and improved training is one step toward solving many of the child care problems identified by these community professionals. Two incentives which would encourage more people to enter the child care profession would be increased salaries and medical benefits. Also, through the establishment of a formal child care provider network, additional providers could be recruited, training and benefits could be organized and administered, substitutes and other support could be provided, and good current providers may not so often leave the profession. With an increased number of providers, more people would be available to provide both extended hour and infant care. However, it may be necessary to provide additional incentives for providers who are willing to care for children during evening hours or care for very young children.

A continuing education program for parents would also help address the child care needs of the county. Parents must learn what quality child care is, and they must be helped to realize that "you get what you pay for" in child care. If parents become more aware of this issue, they may be more willing to pay the increased costs of extended-day or infant care. This would make expanding the scope of existing child care services to include infant and extended hours care more financially feasible. It is apparent from the key informant interviews that Clinton County has many exciting and realistic options available for improving child care in the next five years.